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NEW-YORK

QUARTERLY PAMPHLETEER,

No. I.

MAY, 1849.

THE SLAVERY OF POVERTY, WITH A Plan for its Abolition.

Thou who teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preachest a man not to steal, dost thou steal?—Romans II, 23.

The poor negro must work for others, or be flogged: the poor white man must work for others, or be starved. The poor negro is subjected to a single master: the poor white man is subjected to many masters—subjected to a master class. The poor negro lends the life of a farm-horse: the poor white man, like a horse kept at a livery stable, is worked by every body and cared for by nobody. The poor negro has a master both in sickness and in health: the poor white man is a slave only so long as he is able to toil; and a pauper when he can toil no more.

NEW-YORK:

Printed and Sold for the New-York Society for the Abolition of All Slavery,

BY JOHN WINDT, 69 NASSAU STREET.

Price 6 cents single,

63 per hundred.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE NEW-YORK QUARTERLY PAMPHLETEER will be published, as its title indicates, once in three months, and each number will be devoted to a distinct subject. It is not the intention of the author to continue it after the expiration of the present year.

The August number will give a clear and graphic picture of the workings of what is termed by its advocates "The American System," and will discuss and set forth the true mode of protecting labor. The two remaining numbers will be devoted to topics of still higher interest.

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THE SLAVERY OF POVERTY.

When this "Tract for the Times" was read before the Society by which it is now published, a leading member remarked, "If that Dialogue could be put in the hands of every man in the country, I should consider the emancipation of the laborer as already accomplished." Another member predicted that the whole body of the aristocracy would soon manifest the same opinion—by doing all in their power to misrepresent the character of the work, and to prevent its circulation.

We thereupon determined to enter into an arrangement with some respectable printer whereby it might be retailed at a fair profit for SIX CENTS in every town in the union. Such arrangement we have made with Mr. JOHN WINDT, 99 Reade Street, New-York. Any person or association, by sending him ONE DOLLAR *free of postage*, will receive FIFTY COPIES, by mail or otherwise, as they may direct. He will send them in six or eight distinct packages, directed to as many different persons, if desired. To prevent mistakes, the name of the Post Office and that of the person or persons to whom the copies ordered are to be sent, should always be plainly written.

Our pamphlet may thus be circulated in every part of the United States, without subjecting any man to any perceptible expense or inconvenience. Let those who approve it remember, that great things are done whenever many hands unite in doing each one a little; and that "*little strokes fell great oaks*," as Poor Richard says.

One word as to the Society by which this work is published. We hold that Freedom is the birth-right not of negroes and aristocrats merely, but of ALL MEN. We hold that in order to emancipate the Slave, he must be permitted to enjoy ALL his natural rights; for if the Master should emancipate A PART of the Slave's body and claim the rest as his property—or if he should give up the right of flogging and yet hold on to the power of starving—what would it profit the Slave? We hold that in order to release the Slave from the necessity of tilling the ground for another, we must establish his right to till it for himself; and that this right is as sacred as his right to his body, and as essential to his Freedom. We trust that all Abolitionists will aid us in carrying out these views, and in promulgating these great principles.

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THE SLAVERY OF POVERTY:

A DIALOGUE

Between a Northern Abolitionist and a Southern Slaveholder.

SCENE—*The Parlor of a Boarding House in New-York.*

Slaveholder.—Well, my friend, we shall have no hard words between us this time; for, since our last meeting, I have considered the subject of slavery more carefully, and am now a thorough-going abolitionist.

Abolitionist.—Indeed! Then I can hardly find words to express my gratification. But are you serious?

Slaveholder.—Never more so. I am satisfied that freedom is not only a greater good, but also that it should be held more sacred, than life itself. The murderer harms the body only; but he who destroys my liberty, degrades my soul for ever.

Abolitionist.—A beautiful sentiment! and I rejoice to hear it from you.

Slaveholder.—A fine sentiment, eh? No, no: a mighty truth, rather, and one that should never be disregarded by any man, whether his residence be in the north or the south; for it is a great mistake to suppose that the curse of slavery is altogether caused by legislative enactments, or that in our country it is at all confined to the negro race: it exists every where, and every man is more or less a slave.

Abolitionist.—Explain.

Slaveholder.—You would hardly ask that if you had studied the subject of slavery thoroughly enough to be able to define the word. *Liberty consists in something more than the bare legal ownership of one's own carcass*; and to assume the contrary is either gross folly or gross deceit. Each man is a slave just so far as he is actuated by any external force: in other words, just so far as he is impelled by the will or the contrivances of another, instead of his own independent volition. The poor negro who labors only through fear of a master's whip, is no more a slave than the poor white man who toils through fear of a landlord's warrant or a jail. If the master should employ bribes instead of threats—if he should promise a piece of bacon, or a piece of silver, instead of threatening the lash or the prison—the man thus acted on, whether white or black, is still a slave. To submit oneself to the government of fashion, or custom—this too is slavery. If I suffer my reason, my sense of truth and right, to be mastered by any prejudice or any passion, then am I a slave in soul. So far as I serve any man from any other motive than love, so far am I a slave.

Abolitionist.—You deal largely in abstractions, sir. Perhaps you are an abolitionist in the abstract only, and not in practice?

Slaveholder.—Every pure truth is an abstraction: geometry, and all the exact sciences deal in nothing but abstractions; and there can be no exact reasoning on any subject without them. Therefore, when I see a man sneering at "abstractions," I deem it tantamount to a confession that

his notions will not bear the test of first principles—the test of abstract or unadulterated truth. Pray, how could the architect build a house, if he had not the abstract idea of a house in his mind? And how can we abolish slavery without that “abstraction” a plan of operations?—which plan, to be effective, must be based upon an exact knowledge of the nature and extent of the evil aimed at.

Abol.—But you are aware that the Abolitionists, as a body, confine their efforts to that most aggravated system of slavery to which the negroes are subjected, and by which they are robbed of the fruits of their labor. We do not undertake a task so stupendous as that of releasing every man from all coercion and all extraneous influence. Hence, we do not need to go so deeply into these matters as you seem inclined to do.

Slaveh.—And in this lies your great error. If you sought with an equal eye to effect the enfranchisement of ALL men, you would secure the coöperation of all the friends of freedom; but when you single out an insignificant class for your sympathies—and that, too, the very class least capable of appreciating and preserving true liberty—the world sneeringly asks, “*Is freedom for negroes only?*” and coldly turns away.

Abol.—I must admit that, either from the cause you have named, or some other, the world at large seems more inclined to doubt the honesty of our motives than to aid us in the execution of our designs. Still, we are right. We can give slavery but one blow at a time. We can take but one step in reform at a time. We therefore act wisely in directing our efforts against the greatest wrong, the greatest evil within our reach. The greater the wrong, the more vulnerable is it, and the more necessary that it should be destroyed. Besides, whenever we succeed in abolishing any one great wrong or evil, we always do indirectly destroy ten thousand lesser ones at the same time. The main root of an evil system once killed, all the twigs and branches it supported soon die of themselves.

Slaveh.—I admire your reasoning; but you greatly mistake in supposing that our negro slavery is the worst form of slavery. So far from its being the main root of an evil system, it is only the latest off-shoot. I think I can convince you that the success of the Abolitionists in the specific course they have marked out, so far from doing away with negro slavery even, would aggravate the evil; that the change they propose is not the substitution of freedom for slavery, but the mere exchange of responsible for irresponsible masters; and that we cannot hope to abolish negro slavery except by the overthrow of that more formidable system of disguised slavery which prevails throughout the civilized world, and from which our negro slavery sprung—I mean THE SLAVERY OF POVERTY.

Abol.—I would like to hear the arguments by which you think to prove these positions.

Slaveh.—Very well. Then I will go at my task methodically. Let me see: I am to prove, firstly, that negro slavery is not the worst form of slavery existing among us.

Abol.—Yes.

Slaveh.—Secondly, that modern Abolitionism does not propose to free the negroes even.

Abol.—Yes, you are to prove that, too—if you can.

Slaveh.—And thirdly, that the enfranchisement of the poor whites must precede, and will indirectly bring about, the enfranchisement of the negroes.

Abol.—So you asserted.

Slaveh.—We will begin, then, with my first proposition. The object of slavery is in all cases simply this: to rob the enslaved person of the

fruits of his labor—to compel the exercise of his bodily or mental powers for the master's gain or gratification: consequently, that system must be worst which extorts most. In other words, as all slavery is but robbery reduced to system, we may fairly estimate the amount of force or coercion applied by the amount of unrequited labor exacted.

Abol. Agreed. So far you reason fairly.

Slaveh. Then have I established my first position already. You know the Abolitionists not only admit, but have been preaching to us for years, that if we would discard our slaves, and employ what they falsely term "free" laborers instead, that we would thereby greatly increase our profits; that is, would easily get the labor of "free" men for a smaller compensation than that we now allow our "slaves"—the "free" men to do an equal amount of work, and to do it better.

Abol. But do you class the profits which the capitalist makes on the voluntary labor of the poor man with the gain extorted from slaves by coercion?

Slaveh. Not at all. The difference is as great as that between the act of receiving a present and the act of robbing—that is, if the labor actually be voluntary. But I hold that the labor you call free or voluntary at the north is not so, any more than is that of our negroes; and I shall prove this fact in demonstrating my second position.

Abol. Go on, then; I will hear you through.

Slaveh. You will admit that if I commit murder, it matters not how, so far as the principle of right is concerned. Whether I shall use a pistol or a bowie knife may be a question of convenience, but not of conscience. So, if I enslave a man, and compel him to wear out his life in toiling for my gain, it is no matter how, either to the slave or to the Avenger of the oppressed. Whether I commit my crime single-handed, or join in a combination; whether I seek to justify my oppression by asserting a false claim to the ownership of my brother man's body, or a false claim to the ownership of the air which he must breathe or die; all these trifles have no more to do in determining the degree of my guilt, than has the length of my hair or the fineness of my stockings. Is it not so?

Abol. Certainly. I admit all that.

Slaveh. Now let us look at the distinctive features of our southern system of slavery. We coerce the negro to labor for us by striking him, when refractory, with a whip—by subjecting him to a greater or less degree of bodily pain. Then, in order to justify this system of coercion, we have recourse to one simple lie: we say the negro is our property—that his body and his faculties belong not to himself, not to his Maker, but to us. Such is our practice—such the theory with which our practice accords.

Abol. This I call plain truth, in plain English.

Slaveh. Let us now contrast with negro slavery that more universal system which prevails throughout the civilized world, and which I term *the slavery of poverty*. In consequence of the universality of this slavery, it is impossible for us to conceive an adequate idea of its enormity, and of the violence it does to our better natures and to the original constitution of society. Had you and I been brought up from infancy among cannibals, we could hardly be brought to see the impropriety of eating human flesh, until it should come to *our* turn to be roasted; and even then we should only revolt at being eaten ourselves, not at eating others. So the man who has been brought up to treat, and to see all around him treat, the negro as you treat the horse, can form no just conception of the enormity of negro slavery. And so, also, you to whom the sight of poverty

has always been as familiar as the sight of grass in your meadows, can hardly help thinking that the existence of poverty in human society is a result of some occult law of nature, the same as is the growth of grass. While you instinctively shrink from poverty as you shrink from death, and while you know that many a man has resorted to suicide in order to escape it, still, such is the influence of *habit* over the mind, you can hardly help accusing me of exaggeration when I assert that the poor man is in the fullest sense *a slave*. Yet coolly consider if it be not so. Does not he, like the negro slave, continually do the bidding of a master, *alias* "employer," instead of doing as he pleases for himself? Does not his labor, like that of the negro slave, go to fill another man's barn, another man's warehouse, he having no barn or warehouse of his own? Is he not, like the negro slave, almost universally regarded as an instrument, and not as a man? - - - Our system binds and robs but a few millions, the offspring of a savage and half-embred race; the slavery of poverty binds its hundreds of millions, and keeps its weightiest shackles for the noblest souls. While it suffers the pampered bloodsucker to run riot over the earth, how often has it crushed the patriot, the philosopher, and the philanthropist into an unhonored grave!

Abol. I will admit that poverty is a great evil, and that the poor man is far from being "independent." But do you reason fairly when you attempt to confound poverty with negro slavery? Poverty comes from sickness, laziness, or extravagance, or from some misfortune or fault of the sufferer; the negro is subjected to slavery by **LAW**—by a **PUBLIC CRIME**—and I can see no moral relationship between them.

Slaveh. Are the poor more sickly with you than the rich?

Abol. No—unless when compelled to overwork themselves, or to eat bad food, or to live in cramped, ill-ventilated and dirty lodgings.

Slaveh. Do they work as hard as the rich?

Abol. Ha! ha! ha! You are jesting.

Slaveh. No, I am not. Do they spend more money on trinkets, fine furniture, costly wines, carriages, and the like superfluities, than the rich?

Abol. Why do you ask me such absurd questions?

Slaveh. Absurd, eh! Then how dare you insult my understanding by affirming in one breath falsities so gross that you cannot help laughing at them in the next? Those who do all your work are idle! those who support their families on a dollar a day are extravagant! and owing to such idleness and extravagance they become poor! I would rather be caught sheep-stealing than uttering such silly slanders against the poor. And you can see no analogy between poverty and negro slavery! Why, sir, poverty is the very foundation, soul and essence of negro slavery. The negro is a slave, why? Because he is *so poor* that he does not legally own his own body—and hence he is all his life compelled to till another man's field, and earn money for another man's pocket. The poor man at the north is forced to do the same thing, as you must have seen every day of your life. His poverty is as much the result of **LAW**—of **LEGISLATIVE CRIME**—as that of the negro. The law, it is true, generally allows the poor white to be the owner of his own body, but denies his right to every atom of matter besides. It virtually says to him, "this earth was mine, and I have given it all, with every plant and tree that grows upon it, to a chosen few, called 'the rich.' You are a trespasser here; and the Creator, in placing you here, was guilty of a trespass. If you go into any man's enclosure, I will punish you for trespassing; if you wander about the streets, I will commit you as a vagrant; if you gather food from any field or tree, I will hang you for stealing. Go to the moon if you choose

—but on this earth you have no right.” The poor wretch, finding that God has given him existence without giving him a right to exist in any place—that He has given him life without giving him a right to gather from the fields that food which is necessary to support life—finding, in short, that he is encumbered with a right to his body without having a right to anything else—he is necessitated to walk humbly to some “capitalist’s” door, and to BEG for SLAVERY; saying, partly by dumb looks and actions, and partly in words, “Suffer me to toil for you for this day, at least: deign to become my master, and give me food: then will I work for you so diligently, and do your bidding so obsequiously, that you may perchance suffer me to serve you to-morrow also.” - - - - Great God! what debasement! How must such a system appear to the brotherhood of the just in heaven! Yet this is the “freedom” to which my fellow Abolitionists propose to *elevate* the negro! If the negro slave own nothing else, he does at least own a *master*—not only when healthy and vigorous, but when sick and infirm. He does not have to “beg for leave to toil,” nor to hawk his body and his faculties about the streets, crying, “Who’ll buy my labor? Who’ll buy my strength and skill? Who’ll buy my soul?” If degraded by others, he is at any rate exempt from the necessity of acting as auctioneer at the sale of his own person and faculties—of presiding as hangman at the execution of his own freedom.

Abol. You place the condition of our poor in far too dark a light. You overcharge your picture greatly.

Slaveh. And the pictures drawn by Abolitionists of negro slavery—are they not still more extravagant? Have I said anything half as severe against the rich, their laws and their oppressions, as were the sayings of Jesus? Do you fancy that the picture of these things which will be presented at the day of judgment will be more flattering than mine?

Abol. But are you sure that your notion of the *primary cause of poverty* is correct? Many a man has got rich without ever owning a foot of ground.

Slaveh. I might quote Paley and other learned reasoners, if I chose; but will rather refer you to your own common sense and your own eyes. I know there are secondary causes of poverty which make more show in the eyes of some than that which I have named; yet they would be found as powerless, were the primary cause removed, as a lever without a fulcrum. Though the monopolists of the land disable the rest of mankind from working for themselves—though they can say to the excluded poor, “You shall not dwell on our earth unless you pay us tribute, nor till it unless you give us such share as we may please to exact of the fruits of your labor—yet they are not the only ones, especially in an advanced stage of civilization, who contrive to extract wealth from the sweat of the poor. If a man have money enough, he can hire land—hire factories and workshops—set his brother man to work therein—with the products of such labor pay the ground-lord his rent—and still have a considerable remainder. Yet go into such factory or workshop, and you will find the poor “operative” gains nothing by having two masters to enrich and fatten instead of one. There are many other ways whereby the poor man is compelled to enrich others by his labor—such as “usury,” “increase,” “forestalling,” “speculation,” &c. &c.—none of which could be practiced to any extent if all men were free to till the ground for themselves. What man would do as much work as is necessary to raise ten bushels of potatoes for the price of one bushel, if the law allowed him to plant a potato patch of his own? Who would work in a factory for the gain of another, when he might till the ground for himself, and live independent?

Men would continue to work in shops and factories if the land monopoly were abolished, I admit; but not as now: you would no longer see a hundred working, while one or two "capitalists" pocketed nearly all their earnings.

Abol. But is not the soil as free now as it can be made? Every man now is at liberty to buy as much as he wants.

Slaveh. And are not our negroes at liberty to buy their freedom? And cannot they do it as easily as one of your laborers or mechanics can raise two or three thousand dollars to buy a naked house-lot? In England, many a poor calico weaver works 16 hours a day, and weaves 36 yards for 9d. How grateful should he feel that he is at liberty to buy himself a farm with his wages!—or rather so much of his wages as may remain after buying his family oat meal to starve on, and hiring them a cellar to starve in. - - - - - But there is no need of examining each slave's case in detail—no need of discussing every twig in your system of slavery or in ours. I have shown that the root of both systems is the same—poverty: the poverty of the negro slave consisting in his not legally owning his own body, and that of the white slave in his not owning a sufficiency of the soil for his bodily wants, or to keep himself from starving. We force the negro slave to serve us by flogging him; you *permit* the white slave to serve you as a boon—as the only opening whereby he can escape starvation. Yet in one breath you cry out against the cruelty of our system, saying, "Stand aside! I am holier than thou;" and in the next you appeal to our selfishness, telling us that if we would adopt your system, we could exact greater profits from our slaves—that is, work them harder and pinch them closer—than we now do. I will not insult your understanding by pointing out the folly of such a course—a course so difficult to explain except on the supposition that you want to reduce the wages and increase the rents of your own working class, by enabling ours to compete against them for employment and shelter. Surely, it is high time that we either commence agitating the *whole subject* of slavery, or else that we should let it altogether alone.

Abol. Perhaps so. Yet the main evil of slavery is its influence in debasing the soul of man. You will not contend that poverty is as injurious as negro slavery in this grand particular?*

Slaveh. Have I not shown you that the negro's slavery lies in his poverty no less than the poor white man's? Suppose we were to withdraw our claim to the persons of our negroes, and turn them into the streets, and thus subject them to the necessity of begging leave to serve us: would we thereby either brighten their intellects or improve their

* The slaveholder might have answered this remark by pointing out the *mental* slavery to which our northern poor sometimes are, and at any time *may be* subjected. How often is the poor man compelled to vote against his conscience at our elections, under penalty of being *emancipated*, or "discharged!" We also know of cases where poor white men are compelled to attend their master's church, though deeming such church heretical, under this same penalty of *emancipation*.

Were it the writer's design to defend southern slavery instead of attacking *ALL* slavery, he would institute a comparison between the actual condition of the negro of the south and his condition in Africa, where he is enslaved and sold by men of his own race and kin.

Though a hater of slavery in all its forms, there is one great truth in regard to it which I dare not keep back:—Slavery is merely God's *REVENGE* AGAINST COWARDICE—his just judgment upon those who are false to their own rights and dignity as MEN. God has decreed that Liberty shall be enjoyed only by those who may see fit to deserve it. *Wealth* may be possessed by the dastard, the hypocrite, the cheat, the oppressor: Satan may truly say of the riches of this world, "all these things are mine, and to whomsoever I will I give them;" but *LIBERTY* is the sacred jewel of God, and not all the powers of earth and hell can keep it in the hands of him who will not understand his rights, or who fears to maintain them.

morals? Would their wandering about from house to house, and begging for a temporary master, increase their self-respect? Is not the necessity of begging for slavery more degrading than slavery itself? But let us consider the workings of your system of poverty in another light. Each poor man among you must see, from his youth up, that Mammon is the god of this world, and that men are publicly estimated according to the fidelity and success with which they serve him. On one side he sees the pleasures that wealth can purchase—troops of servants, “rivers of wine, rivers of oil, and bright-eyed maidens;” on the other, **THE POOR-HOUSE**—that hell above ground, where hope never enters—that dreary common where the worn-out laborer is turned loose to die. He sees that the former are given to those who are most dexterous in practicing upon the credulity or the necessities of their fellows; and that the latter is too often the final reward of guileless honesty and useful toil. His whole soul is absorbed in the desire to gain the one and to escape the other. He cannot attain his natural rights upon the earth—his just position in society—without uprooting the supremacy of wealth, and changing the whole structure of society—a task which he can by no means accomplish single-handed. Neither has he the leisure nor the means to bring the scattered millions of the oppressed together in one grand army, and to unite them in any one scheme of deliverance. He sees but this one door of escape: to find out men poorer, weaker than himself, and shift his burden upon their shoulders. By eradicating from his heart all sympathy for his fellows, he may perchance rise from the condition of slave to the dignity of slave driver. He may borrow from some capitalist the means of speculating upon the toil and the necessities of his brethren, on condition of dividing the spoils with his patron. With the gain derived from the labor of one hireling, or slave dismissable at will, he may speculate upon another—and so go on until he becomes rich, respected, hated. I know you regard this as one of the excellencies of your system—that the ridden are free to ride if they can succeed in mounting—that the wrecked are free to become wreckers—the oppressed to become oppressors in their turn. But do you not see that each new rider adds to the load of those who support all? and that this is the grand reason why the condition of your poor gets worse and worse, the difficulty of mounting greater and greater, every year? Worst of all, this feature in your system compels each slave to eye with the scowl of suspicion every movement of his fellow slave. It sets each man's hand against his fellow, and every man's hand against him. *Our* slaves have none but their masters to fear; yours stand isolated, dreading and hating both the rich and each other.

Abol. Even supposing your views are correct, why draw such a shocking picture of evils which are incurable—evils which an all-wise Providence—

Slaveh. Hold! I can have no patience with the blasphemous charge against Providence which you were about to utter. Providence made this world big enough for all, and stocked it with a sufficiency for all, if we would only use fair play among ourselves. Why is it that you can so readily see God's hand in the wrongs done to the poor, while if a poor man steal a sheep from the rich man's flock, you cannot see God's hand in the matter at all? God never instituted poverty any more than he instituted theft among men: consequently it is not an incurable evil. Our savage tribes once enjoyed universal pecuniary independence; then why may not we?

Abol. Well, well—if you are so certain that poverty is a curable evil, tell us how it can be removed?

Slaveh. Why, just as you propose to abolish negro slavery—by withdrawing from unjust power the support of law—by making law the protector, and not the robber, of labor—by repealing every social regulation whereby the rich are enabled to derive wealth from the toil, or to levy taxes on the existence, of the poor.

Abol. This sounds well. But before repealing our present laws in relation to the rights of soil, we must frame some better system to put in their place. I know that all writers on natural law—Locke, Blackstone, Paley, and all—admit that every human being has naturally, or from the Creator, a right to the use of the soil; but these wise men do not seem to have discovered any practical mode of enjoying this right better than the one they found established.

Slaveh. Perhaps these wise men, as you call them, were wise enough to know that persecution would be their sole reward in this life, if they ventured to shed too much light on the matter. You do not suppose that God could endow all men with a right to the soil, and yet make it practically impossible for all to freely enjoy such right?

Abol. I dare not accuse Him of such inconsistency or weakness as that. But to the point. How do you propose to place each man in possession of his just portion of the soil, so that he shall be free from encroachment, and free to labor for himself? Would you give the same number of acres to all, without regard to quality? That would be unfair. Would you give the merchant or the mechanic as much as the farmer? Then they must all turn farmers, or else let their portions lie waste.

Slaveh. Ah! what a fine problem for the crack-brained tribe of system builders! But you will please to remember that I do not belong to that fraternity, and pray God I may never catch their infection. Neither is any complicated scheme requisite to effect my object. We may “place each man in possession of his just portion of the soil, so that he shall be free from encroachment and free to labor for himself,” without affecting our existing land titles in the smallest degree.

Abol. Impossible! What do you mean?

Slaveh. You must remember that my object is the abolition of a specific wrong—slavery—the slavery of poverty. Suppose that highway robbery had been long countenanced and encouraged by our laws, and that it were now desired to abolish the practice—would it be necessary, in order to do this, to frame an agrarian law in regard to pistols and bludgeons, and so equalize their distribution that all men should be equally matched? No. We would let each man keep as many pistols and bludgeons as he might choose, but forbid him from using these weapons to extort from any man his labor, or the fruits of his labor. So in regard to landed property. Let the landholders keep all they have got, and get all they can. *I would merely take from every man the legal power to exact ground-rent from his fellow man.* Do you see anything so mighty difficult in that?

Abol. O! that would be easy enough. But would so simple a remedy destroy the evil aimed at?

Slaveh. The opponents of the measure (for you can strike at no abuse without arousing opponents) will soon satisfy you on that point. Why, sir, this principle, carried out, would be potent enough to annihilate even the undisguised slavery of the south. Let our southern legislators say to the slaveholders—“You tell us those negroes are yours: so be it, then: but remember that **LABOR IS THE PROPERTY OF THE LABORER**; and beware how you make your claim to their bodies a pretext for robbing them of

that:"—How long, in such case, would the negro be held in bondage?
 Examine this remedy in all its bearings, and you will find it no less efficacious than just.

Abol. But would it be just? It looks very like a quibble to me.

Slaveh. That is because the distinction is so *exact*, not because it is fanciful. There is a very broad distinction between the right to hold a farm as a field for your industry, and the right to use it as an instrument to exact labor and service from your brother man. You may annihilate the latter without at all abridging the former. And surely, to make labor in all cases the property of the laborer cannot be unjust.

Abol. I am not yet fully satisfied, though I can hardly say why.

Slaveh. That is because you have never properly considered the foundation of all Human Rights. Observe that every Right of man grows out of some corresponding Duty. The God of Nature has imposed upon each man many Duties; and that only can be claimed as a Right which is essential to the performance of some Duty.* Thus, man's Right to occupy and till the ground grows out of his Obligation to preserve his life and all the faculties with which he is endowed by the Creator; for he cannot perform this Duty without exercising this Right. Our Right to breathe the air grows out of the same Duty. So does our Right to labor, and to enjoy the fruits of our labor. Before I can claim a Right for myself which I do not concede to others, I must show that the Creator requires me to perform a corresponding Duty which he does not require of others. The test by which a Right may always be known is this: *What Duty is it essential to the performance of?* Every pretended Right that will not bear this test is a Wrong, and should be abolished. There can be no *conflicting* Rights, because the Creator has not committed the absurdity of imposing conflicting Duties upon his children. *Ergo*, my Right to the soil cannot destroy your Right to your labor, and should never be allowed to produce that result in practice.

Abol. The hints you have just uttered throw a clearer light upon the Rights of Man than I have ever received from any other source. But go on.

Slaveh. As all men are subject to the same *general* Duties, so all must possess the same *general* Rights; and in this sense all have Equal Rights. But the *specific* nature and extent of our Duties depend upon the specific character of our faculties, and on their extent. A Calhoun or a Channing has Duties, and therefore Rights, which an idiot has not; yet the idiot has the same right to a fair field for the exercise of his *one* talent that a Calhoun has for his *ten*. Thus you see, when we attempt to define each man's rights by law, in all their detail, we attempt an absurdity; for even the same man's *specific* rights are constantly changing with the growth and decay of his faculties. It is by their attempts to do this impossible thing of permanently defining men's *specific* Rights, that legislators have filled the world with *false* Rights, or Wrongs; and all their attempts to correct such Wrongs by amending such imperfect definitions only increase the number. *Without* "mending one hole, they make twenty more." Hence I am opposed to any new human law for regulating the distribution of the soil. The new law would merely cause new evils, without curing the old. I cannot say how much land *you* ought to have—you cannot say how much *I* ought to have—so each must say to the other, "Get all you

* It is believed this rule is without an exception. At first sight one might say the Right to take a walk for pleasure, or the like, is not deducible from any specific Duty; but a closer examination shows, that as the enjoyment and diffusion of innocent pleasure is the great end of our being, whatever contributes to this end, whether much or little, is therefore a Right—a Power necessary or auxiliary to the performance of a Duty.

want, if possible; if not, get what you can." - - - But in thus abstaining from the imposition of all *arbitrary* restrictions as to the quantity of land the individual may engross, society does not and cannot absolve him from those *natural conditions* to which his Right must be for ever subject. He must keep good the *foundation* of his right, or the right ceases. As he can claim a Right to the soil only on the ground that its enjoyment is necessary to the performance of certain Duties, he must *perform* such Duties. He can have no right to seize God's property for the base purpose of withholding it from others. Still less can he employ a *special* Right, a right peculiar to himself, to destroy a *universal* Right—a Right on which rests God's claim to His creation—the Right of the worker to his work. No matter how complete my right to a farm—or to a pistol—the moment I convert either into an engine wherewith to rob you of your labor, my right to it dies. When a special right is brought in conflict with one that is universal, the lesser must fall, the stronger triumph.

Abol. I see the drift of your reasoning—the practical result to which your argument tends. While allowing each man the Right to keep as much land as he pleases, you would make him perform the Duty of tilling it?

Slaveh. Yes—allowing him, of course, to reserve sufficient woodland.

Abol. If he failed to do this, you would cease to acknowledge his right to the land claimed and lying idle?

Slaveh. Certainly—unless he could plead sickness, or some good excuse.

Abol. And if, instead of tilling it himself, he were to attempt to exact ground rent from the man who should till it in his place, you would confiscate it as you would a highwayman's pistol?

Slaveh. Yes—the overseers of the poor for the town in which the land might be situated, or the people of such town at their town meeting, should place it in the hands of some one who *would* till it.

Abol. Yet you would allow any man, having more land than he wanted to work, to *sell* his surplus?

Slaveh. Certainly. I think the established theory, though most grossly perverted in practice, to be correct. The landholder, we take it for granted, has in every case expended more or less labor in fitting his land for human occupancy; and, theoretically, it is this *labor*, not the portion of earth with which it is in a manner incorporated, for which he receives payment. But we all know that, *practically*, under the laws established here by the British aristocracy, the landholder, in selling a farm, does virtually sell the *power of exacting ground-rent*—the power of exacting labor and service from the poor; and, on an average, nine-tenths of the purchase money paid is in reality given for this power, and not for the seller's improvements. It is solely to this *abuse* that I object—not to the just theory that is perverted to screen it.

Abol. So far I think your theory might be reduced to practice, if the people at large should approve it. But what would you do in regard to house rent? If I have two houses, must I personally occupy both, or abandon my title? Must nine-tenths of our people sleep in the streets, because their landlords are no longer allowed to exact rent, and are not disposed to give the use of their houses for nothing?

Slaveh. A house is simply a *product of human labor*; and our laws should regard it the same as any other product of labor. It is as legitimately an article of merchandise as a watch or a coat. You seem to think I cannot concede to one man the right to a dozen houses without abandoning my theory of the foundation of Human Rights. It is not so. The Duty to labor would be imperfect without the Right to a *place* for storing the products of labor. The jeweler requires very little space for this

purpose; the cooper requires more; and the housebuilder more still; yet the builder's Right to a sufficiency is as good as the jeweler's. Again—it is every man's duty to accumulate as much labor as he deems necessary for his support in time of sickness or old age. This Duty involves the Right to storeroom for such accumulated labor, whether accumulated in the form of houses, or in the more compact form of gold. But while conceding to the fullest extent the right of accumulating labor, *alias* wealth, I would not allow the accumulator to take advantage of his poor brother's necessity, as he now does, to exact more labor than he gives in return. Neither would I do anything in the way of legislation to encourage the mean practice so prevalent in your city of living in borrowed houses. Least of all would I permit the exaction of *ground* rent in the shape of *house* rent. I would do all I could to induce men to *sell* the houses they do not want for their own use. I would require house owners to give the tenant three months' notice before they could turn his family into the streets, and would give them no remedy at law for the collection of rent;* thus leaving them to sell their surplus houses, or to take what rent the tenant might be able to pay in advance, or to be content with a rent so moderate that public opinion would enforce its payment, or to keep their houses empty while the taxes were eating them up. I would thus strive to stop that accursed system which now compels your poor white slaves to pay for a house ten times over without getting it at last. Such regulations would bring down the price of houses to their natural value: a house that was built with 500 days labor could be bought for 500 days labor, as it ought to be; and every man worthy to live at all might then soon have a house of his own to live in.

Abol. We all feel that men's homes are too much an article of speculation at present; and, by carrying out your suggestions, we should no doubt greatly abridge that evil. But I have another question for you: Would you permit the cultivation of land by *hired* labor? Would you let the large landholder enjoy his Right in person while he performed its correlative Duty by proxy? If so, would it not be the same thing in fact as allowing the exaction of ground rent?

Slaveh. The laws which we now have prohibiting highwaymen from exacting *road* rent do not at all restrict the rights of travel; and I think we might just as easily prohibit the exaction of ground rent without restricting any legitimate right of capital or of labor.† You cannot deny the right of one man to hire another without stopping all exchange, and making

* As the application of this principle to ALL debts—or the project of making all money contracts *debts of honor*—has already been agitated in our state legislature, the following opinions in reference to this subject will be read with interest:—JOHN ADAMS, in a letter to Judge Hertell, Feb. 1823, after stating that he “should feel a diffident hesitation in giving a public opinion upon this question,” [the abolition of imprisonment for debt] says, “If the question now were *whether credit should be tolerated in society at all, except at the absolute hazard of the creditor*, I should not hesitate.” . . . The following extract from the writings of JEFFERSON shows that his sagacious and liberal mind had arrived at a similar conclusion:—“Desperate of finding relief from a free course of justice, I look forward to the abolition of all credit [meaning all credit not based *exclusively* on the integrity of the debtor] as the only remedy which can take place. How happy a people were we during the war, from the single circumstance that we could not run in debt!”

† The right of employing hirelings, like that of making a fire, and every other right, may be abused, it is true; but it seldom would be if the forfeiture of the right were the certain penalty of its abuse. The best regulation ever devised to prevent its abuse was doubtless that of Moses, requiring the payment of the hireling's wages every night; but no specific enactment can prevent the abuse of this or any other general right. If necessary, I would therefore give the people of each town power to declare the right forfeit, by a vote at town meeting, in the case of any person who they were fully satisfied had abused it within their jurisdiction, or used it to the injury of the poor.

every man a hermit. There are many who are only fit to work as hirelings. There are others who have a peculiar talent for directing labor wisely, and whose Duty it therefore is to employ that talent. Besides, there is no necessity for restricting the trade in labor, even if all restrictions on trade were not inherently wrong. 'Tis enough that we prohibit the engrosser of the soil from peopling land that he is too lazy to till or to oversee, with tenants to whom he renders no assistance in their labors, and yet exacts one half of all their work for granting them the liberty of working. This simple measure, accompanied with the enforcing of the landholder's Obligation to cultivate the soil he claims, would place the hireling on a new footing, and enable him to get a full equivalent for his work.

Abol. Don't make too sure of that. If your measure would quite prevent the capitalist from extracting a profit from the hireling, he would no longer hire the poor at all.

Slaveh. You do not yet see the bearings of that measure in their full extent. Why is it that the poor hireling now sells his labor to the capitalist for less than it is worth—giving ten hours work for the product of one hour's work? Simply because he is under an irresistible necessity to sell his wealth (*alias* labor) immediately, while the rich man is wholly free from such necessity. The poor man's wealth is latent, and as powerless while in that state as the latent heat of an icicle; the rich man's wealth is tangible, and ripe for enjoyment. The poor man must sell his latent wealth, his labor, or starve; the rich man must sell his ripe wealth, or—*enjoy it himself!* Were the rich subject to an equal necessity with the poor, the poor could drive an equal bargain with them. Now if society, in all its laws, would recognize the beautiful truth, *that every Right is merely a Power necessary to the performance of a Duty*, and that no man's claim to any Right should be respected unless he should faithfully perform that Duty for the performance of which the Right claimed was given by the Creator, then would the rich and the poor, the capitalist and the laborer, be at once **SUBJECTED TO AN EQUAL NECESSITY, AND PLACED ON AN EQUAL FOOTING.** The landholder would be compelled to perform the Duty of tilling his ground in order to preserve his Right of holding it. All who have engrossed more than they can till would have to sell their surplus, or give it up to the public, or hire men to assist them in their work. Capital could play the dog in the manger no longer. There would be the same competition among the rich to make sale of their surplus land that there would be among the poor to make sale of their labor. The rich, in order to avoid selling their lands at what they deemed a sacrifice, would have to compete against each other for hirelings so strongly, that every hireling could obtain for his labor all that it was intrinsically worth. Nor would these great results be temporary merely. They would continue FOR EVER.

Abol. I see! I see! You have disclosed a thunderbolt that must shiver the sceptre of Mammon to atoms. I cannot contemplate it coolly. . . . Yet would not the measure operate harshly in many cases?

Slaveh. What! harsh to enforce the bounds which God himself has set to the right of accumulation? harsh to enforce God's own check upon human avarice? No! no! the harshness lies the other way—in allowing the sons of Mammon to run riot upon the earth, robbing the child in the cradle of its inheritance, taking the strong man's toil for nought, and leaving him, when exhausted by years of drudgery, no refuge but the poor house or the grave! This is harsh! Yet in enforcing this check upon avarice, I would of course give it the most liberal interpretation possible towards minors, and widows, and all who are aged or infirm.

Abol. One thing more. You stated some time back that the liberation of our white poor would bring about the emancipation of the negro. You have not yet told me how.

Slaveh. Fie! fie! Can you still suppose that negro slavery is caused by the occult influence of printed words bound up in white calfskin, and labeled "LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA?" All slavery consists in this—that men are compelled to bow down before and acknowledge some False Right. Each one feels in his heart that the right is false, and at the same time knows that he cannot resist it single-handed; knows if he could even overthrow *one*, he would still be subject to *others* no less oppressive. He knows that to be truly free, he must have some infallible test by which ALL False Rights shall be stripped naked—a test, too, which ALL MEN can apply—which ALL MEN *must* in their hearts acknowledge. Such test is the principle of graduating each man's Rights by the same scale by which he himself graduates his Duties, and making the legal existence of the former to depend upon the performance of the latter. Do you suppose this test can be employed without being communicated? Will not one man learn it of another, and one nation of another, until it shall be known to all? The negro has thus far been kept in bondage because you have never given him even a distant view of freedom; for the stupid negro knows, if Abolitionists do not, that to be turned out of doors to wander over the earth like a dog without a master is *not* freedom.

Abol. What a mighty change in the aspect of society would the adoption of that one regulating principle bring about! Why, you would hardly get any man to take over 100 acres of ground as a present! The right to the land once fully separated from the right to rob those who occupy and till it, what nation would go to war to increase its territory? The true moving cause of all wars would be removed; nation would no longer rise up against nation, or man against man. 'Tis wildness to think of so great a change! It cannot be brought about.

Slaveh. Pray, do you find the world around you just now remarkably well pleased with things as they are? The mass of men were never so anxious for "a change," aye, and a GREAT change, as now. The whole world is pining for a social revolution. It will come upon us, too, like a thief in the night. Who but must see all the old symptoms of approaching revolution around him?—"the four pillars of government shaken"—"much poverty"—"much discontent;" and in addition to all this, the giant power of STEAM has destroyed the ancient dependence of capital upon labor; thus producing such a terrible dearth of drudgery that the working classes *must* achieve a social revolution or starve. But even should we set aside these pregnant signs of the times as things of no moment, we still have the strongest possible testimony that a great social revolution is near at hand. You are yet a believer in the Scriptures?

Abol. Yes.

Slaveh. And the prophecies therein concerning the overthrow of the empire of Mammon, and the reign of universal righteousness and peace—do you not believe these also?

Abol. I am ashamed of having given you occasion to remind me of these glorious promises. Yes, yes!—we have God's own word that justice shall yet triumph over iniquity—that men shall beat their swords into ploughshares—and that *the same hand that sows shall reap the field!*

Slaveh. In my opinion negro slavery, hateful and unjust as it is, will yet be found to have contributed greatly to the establishment of that happy state of society which we are told shall prevail over the whole earth.

Abol. How so? Can God bring good out of *that* evil?

Slaveh. Look back at all the kingdoms of the earth, and what do you

see? Each is but a part of one great SYSTEM OF SLAVERY which has for 4000 years trampled down the children of men, and under which the laborer has had no more voice in the laws or mandates issued by the master class, than the poor negro in the orders given him by his driver. He has had no legal rights except such rights as the master class did not think worth taking away. He has been forced to commit murder at their bidding, and to hazard his life in their quarrels. Our fathers opened a door of escape from this infamous system of slavery. They established a system of government under which the laborer would have full power to repeal those aristocratic laws that had so long held him in servitude. The aristocracy of the old world, and their confederates in the new, have ever since been making the most strenuous efforts (sometimes secret, sometimes open) to subvert that system of government, before the working classes should learn to appreciate and to exercise the power it placed within their reach, and thus teach their brethren all over the world how to unhorse their riders. In all their efforts to subvert our Constitution, by inducing Congress to usurp powers never delegated to it by the states—such as the power of chartering a National Bank, or that of embarking the government in those stockjobbing schemes called “internal improvements,” or that of compelling the consumers of manufactured goods to pay heavy taxes to your manufacturing companies through the operation of a protective tariff—I need not tell you that they have been mainly thwarted thus far by southern influence. The influence of the farmers and working classes of the north has been trifling compared with that of your banks and speculators. Your poor have but little leisure to study the great truths of political science, and but feeble means of consulting or acting together. Your rich have an opposite interest; for the poorer the laborer the cheaper can they get his labor. But at the south, the rich no less than the poor, are *sellers of labor*, and of course it is for their interest to defeat all the projects of your aristocrats and speculators to depress the sellers of labor. Hence it is that the southern planter and the northern hod-carrier or journeyman mechanic are so generally found on the same side. Hence, too, the hatred of the British and northern aristocracy against negro slavery. We have done for the Constitution and for the laboring interest what we could not have done had we been subjected to the same incessant bodily toil as your sellers of labor at the north. The northern poor may therefore thank negro slavery that the combined aristocracy of the old world and the new have not already succeeded in covertly robbing them of all political power, and destroying their every chance of self-emancipation. They now can, and speedily *must*, do one of two things: either suffer our government to become a government of usurped powers—a domination of the plunderer over the plundered—or else abolish all those imported laws that are at war with the spirit of our Constitution;—laws contrived by feudal “lords,” their mental prostitutes and attorneys, for the aggrandizement of Capital and the enslaving of Labor. They will do the latter. They will teach Capital that the existence of its Rights must depend upon the performance of its Duties. They will thus place present Labor, living Labor, upon an equal footing with accumulated or past Labor. The empire of Wealth will cease. The chains of Mammon will be broken. Every man will be FREE—free to exercise any Right he may choose, provided he perform its correlative Duty. The sun will once more shine upon a happy world.

Abol. God grant it may be so! But look at the clock. I have proved myself a better listener than talker this evening, and you have rewarded me by opening a vast field for reflection—perchance for action. I shall long remember this interview. Good night.